

AperTO - Archivio Istituzionale Open Access dell'Università di Torino

## The Influence of Length of Stay, Linguistic Competence, and Media Exposure in Immigrants' Adaptation

### This is the author's manuscript

*Original Citation:*

*Availability:*

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/52843> since

*Published version:*

DOI:10.1177/1069397108326289

*Terms of use:*

Open Access

Anyone can freely access the full text of works made available as "Open Access". Works made available under a Creative Commons license can be used according to the terms and conditions of said license. Use of all other works requires consent of the right holder (author or publisher) if not exempted from copyright protection by the applicable law.

(Article begins on next page)



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO

***This is an author version of the contribution published on:***

*Questa è la versione dell'autore dell'opera:*

*[Cross-Cultural Research, 43, 1, 2009,*

**Doi:10.1177/1069397108326289**

***The definitive version is available at:***

*La versione definitiva è disponibile alla URL:*

*[<http://ccr.sagepub.com>]*

Running head: IMMIGRANTS ADAPTATION

Word count = 5,871

The influence of length of stay, linguistic competence and media  
exposure on immigrants adaptation.

Anna Miglietta

Stefano Tartaglia

University of Turin

#### Authors' Note

Anna Miglietta, Department of Psychology, University of Turin, Via  
Verdi, 10, 10124 Turin, Italy. Phone: ++390116702016 fax:  
++390116702061; E-mail: [anna.miglietta@unito.it](mailto:anna.miglietta@unito.it) (corresponding  
author)

Stefano Tartaglia, Department of Psychology, University of Turin,  
Via Verdi, 10, 10124 Turin, Italy. Phone: ++390116702055 fax:  
++390116702061; E-mail: [stefano.tartaglia@unito.it](mailto:stefano.tartaglia@unito.it)

### Abstract

Empirical evidence shows that best results in immigrants' adaptation are related to their ability to negotiate between the cultural entities in which they are involved. This process is strongly influenced by factors such as cultural knowledge, length of stay in the new culture, and linguistic competence. Length of stay and linguistic competence may indeed be essential requirements for cultural knowledge acquisition that, in turn, may be enhanced by mass-media consumption. 576 immigrants belonging to three ethno-cultural groups (196 Romanians, 179 North Africans and 201 Latino Americans) completed a short questionnaire. investigating the following aspects: time spent in Italy, proficiency in the Italian language, familiarity with both Italian and homeland mass-media, and acculturation. We hypothesized that language plays a central role in the acculturation process, whereas we assumed that length of stay influences acculturation mostly through linguistic competence and mass-media knowledge. A structural equation model was tested to verify the hypothesis. The model resulted acceptable, invariant across genders and partially invariant across ethno-cultural groups.

Keywords: Acculturation process, Emotional belonging,  
Language, Length of stay

Since the 1990s, Italy has evolved from being a country from which people emigrated, to being a country of choice for people of many different origins. With an immigrant population of about 3,035,000 people from over 190 different communities and making up 5.2% of its population, Italy is one of the most important countries of immigration in Europe (Caritas/Migrantes Dossier, 2006).

Immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon in Italy, but there is no doubt that it may now be considered a structural factor of Italian society. There are growing signs that the immigrant population is now putting down roots: on the one hand there is demographic normalization, i.e. a basic equivalence of both genders as well as a growing number of children born in the country from non Italian parents, and on the other hand there is also increased residential stability. From 2001 to 2006, 320,000 of the new arrivals had become Italian citizens<sup>1</sup>, while 60% of immigrants had resided in the country for over 5 years. Immigrants in Italy tend to be quite young: 70% were under 40 years of age in 2005 (Caritas/Migrantes Dossier, 2006). They mostly tend to settle in the Northern regions of Italy, mainly Lombardy (23.5%), Veneto (11%) and Emilia Romagna (10.7%). In

---

<sup>1</sup>The low number of naturalisations is due to Italian citizenship laws, based on a “blood right” (or *ius sanguinis*) conception. Indeed, it is only possible for foreigners citizens to become Italian citizens through marriage with an Italian citizen, or after a number of years of continuous regular residence and work in the country (10 years for non EU citizens, 5 years for EU citizens). Children born in Italy from non Italian parents, however, are not Italian citizens.

Piedmont, the region where the present data was collected, immigrants make up 8% of the total population.

As in the case of other countries, Italy now has to face numerous challenges posed by immigrant settlement, first and foremost the need to adapt to a new social environment. Adaptation is the ultimate goal of the acculturation process; it basically constitutes the main consequence of direct, long-lasting intercultural contact (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936). According to Sam & Berry (1995), acculturation refers to “the behavioral and psychological changes that occur as a result of contact between people belonging to different cultural groups” (p. 10). Cultural changes happen in both majority and minority groups, even though it is fair to say that the latter undergo a greater change compared to the former. As implied by the above definition, the acculturation process can be seen both from a psychological and a behavioral point of view. The first is defined in terms of psychological and emotional wellbeing. In this sense, adaptation is influenced by personality factors, life changes, coping strategies and social support, while behavioral aspects are referred to as social abilities and cultural learning; these two facets of acculturation are strongly interrelated (Berry, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1999)

As is now widely acknowledged in the literature (Berry, 1980, 1990, 1997; LaFromboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993; Nguyen, Messé & Stollak, 1999), acculturation is a two-dimensional process in which two independent attitudes represent the dominant aspects. These two attitudes dimensions can vary independently (Liebkind, 2001) and have been translated by Berry (1970, 1997) into the following two questions: Is it considered a value to maintain one's cultural heritage? Is developing relationships with the larger society considered to be of value? The cross-referencing of 'yes' or 'no' answers to these two questions bring to light four acculturation strategies – integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. This model highlights that acculturation is a process of negotiation (Berry, Poortiga, Segall & Dasen, 1992; Buriel, 1993), from which individuals emerge with their own interpretation of appropriate values, customs, and practices. This product of the interaction between the cultural contexts can be assessed through all the factors that the literature on acculturation has identified as overlapping elements of psychological responses to cultural exposure: cultural loyalty, solidarity, identification and comprehension (Tropp, Erkut, Garcia Coll, Alarcón & Vasquez Garcia, 1999). In this sense we can say that, on the whole, a positive adaptation involves, among its psychological dimension, the development of a sense of emotional attachment to the new culture,

that implies to understand and to accept its prevailing norms and values. This emotional belonging does not necessarily lead to the loss of its own cultural identity. However, it could predict immigrants' degree of identification with the host culture, and it could be considered a result of both integration and assimilation attitudes.

#### Length of stay and linguistic competence

Empirical evidence shows that length of stay in the host culture influences adaptation (e.g. Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima, 1998).

As a matter of fact, a long-lasting stay in a host country makes it easier for immigrants to become familiar with their new social context, so it might be said that, in the acculturation process, time is the 'sleeping partner'. Adaptation is also influenced by cultural knowledge, the degree of interaction and identification with the host culture, cultural distance, linguistic competence and the attitudes and strategies of acculturation (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward, 1996, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Many of these factors taken together make up a sort of general 'socio-cultural competence' which represents a fundamental tool for immigrants, who need to participate in the host culture in order to fully gather the meaning of social events.

Language, in particular, is indeed a central topic in immigrants' adaptation, since it represents the main way to interact



with the host population. However, language is also strictly related to identity issues, and represents a criterion for distinguishing between in-group and out-group status, thereby bonding the person to his/her cultural group (Vedder & Virta, 2005). Following Harré (1998), the symbolic values expressed through language contribute in determining the contents of the self's different expressions. Recent findings from a large international study on the acculturation and adaptation of immigrant youth (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Sam, Vedder, Ward & Horenczyk, 2006) identified four acculturation profiles (i.e.: integration, ethnic, national and diffuse). The ethnic profile was characterized by high ethnic identity and high ethnic language proficiency. At the opposite, the national profile showed high host national identity and low ethnic identity, high proficiency in host language and a predominant use of this. A good proficiency in both host and ethnic languages, and high ethnic and national identities characterized the integration profiles. Finally, the so-called diffuse profile was characterized by low ethnic and national identities and low national language proficiency. The integration and national profiles were more frequent among immigrants with longer residence.

To sum up, language plays a double-facet role: on the one hand, host language proficiency could favor adaptation; on the other

hand, the maintenance of ethnic language could contribute in strengthening the ties with the homeland culture.

In 1988, Kim suggested that individuals entering a new culture could attain a higher level of adaptation by being exposed to host country mass-media and through greater interaction with members of the new culture. Mass-media (mainly TV and newspapers) may be thought of as social and cultural agents that might well facilitate the acculturation process through the spreading of norms and values (Barnett & McPhail, 1980). Some theorists have argued that exposure to media from other cultures may promote cultural changes (Gerbner, 1969; Varan, 1998), and help individuals to reduce the discrepancies between their original culture and that of the host country (Kim, 1988; Reece & Palmgreen, 2000; Sam & Berry, 1995). In their analysis of language-related objects that mark the public arena, Landry and Bourhis (1997) identify the media as a subcomponent of the linguistic landscape. They suggest that the language of the media might play an acculturating role, thereby contributing to the definition of the environment's cultural polarity. So, through exposure to host-culture mass-media, immigrants may be provided with a broader range of cultural elements, which in turn helps them refine their insights and predictions about host culture behaviors. On the other hand, the mass-media (mainly satellite TV) can also help immigrants to maintain

cultural contacts with their homelands, thereby contributing to fostering in-group identity (Kim, 1984; Shibutani & Kwan, 1965).

### Aims and Hypotheses

On the grounds of previous considerations we assumed that length of stay does not exercise any direct influence on emotional belonging to the host culture, while we expected that language affects it both in a direct and an indirect way, helping socio-cultural competence acquisition.

More specifically our hypotheses stated that: (a) proficiency in the host language (Italian) would have a positive influence both on the familiarity and the consumption of host culture media and on the use of this language with members of the in-group, as well as on the developing of the sense of emotional attachment to host culture; (b) using the host language with other in-group members would positively influence emotional belonging to host culture; (c) consuming host culture mass-media would positively influence adaptation, whereas continued viewing of homeland mass-media products would have a negative effect.

As far as length of stay is concerned, our hypothesis state that (d) it would affect proficiency in the host language and gradually reduce consumption of homeland mass media.

## METHOD

### Participants

We carried out the study on 576 immigrants living in Piedmont (average age of 31.04 years,  $SD = 9.19$ ), belonging to three different ethnic groups: 201 Latinos (mainly from Peru), 196 Romanians, and 179 North Africans (mainly from Morocco).

In 2005, Romanians were the largest immigrant nationality group in Italy (11.9%), whereas 15.9% of foreigners living in Italy came from North Africa (11.3% from Morocco) and 9.3% were from Latin America (2.2% from Peru). The data for the present study were gathered in the fall-winter period of 2005/2006.

252 participants were male (43.8%) and 324 (56.2%) were female; there were no differences in gender between ethnic groups.

Participants were initially contacted through cultural associations and Italian language schools, and subsequently, by a 'snowball' sampling procedure.

### Instrument and Analysis

The data were gathered by means of a questionnaire whose administration was carried out at the association premises or at the schools. It took participants about 15 minutes to fill in the

questionnaire. Respondents received a small token of appreciation. The questionnaire was translated in Spanish, Romanian, and Arabic. The translation was carried out by professional native speakers and a back-translation was also done to ensure correctness. Participants were free to choose to fill out the questionnaire in their mother-tongue or in Italian. 373 participants (64.8%) preferred the mother-tongue version, whereas 203 (35.2%) chose the Italian.

The questionnaire included 5 sets of variables.

1. Emotional belonging . We used an adaptation of the *Psychological Acculturation Scale* (PAS, Tropp *et al.*, 1999). The PAS was originally developed to assess an individual's sense of belonging within, and understanding of, the Anglo American and Latino-Hispanic cultures. Following Stevens, Pels, Vollebergh & Crijnen (2004), we selected five items measuring respondents' sense of emotional attachment as suitable for the Italian context (e.g.: "In your opinion, which group of people do you understand best?"; "What group of people do you feel you share most of your beliefs and values?"). Items were rated on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*complete identification with the original ethnic group*) to 5 (*complete identification with the Italian group*), where the value of 3 was associated to a bicultural

orientation (*origin and host equally*), which can be defined as a sense of a connection to both cultures (Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980). The internal consistency was good for all the languages (Italian,  $\alpha = .81$ ; Spanish,  $\alpha = .70$ ; Romanian,  $\alpha = .82$ ; Arabic,  $\alpha = .66$ ).

2. Proficiency in Italian, assessed by means of a single self-evaluation item ('How well do you speak Italian?') was rated on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very well*).

3. Use of Italian with members of the in-group was measured by means of two items assessing which language (mother tongue or Italian) was spoken (a) with family and (b) with friends or compatriots. The 5 point Likert-type scales ranged from 1 (*mainly mother tongue*) to 5 (*mainly Italian*); the value 3 was referred to a mixed language preference (3= *both mother tongue and Italian*)

4. Exposure to Italian mass media was measured by means of two items respectively, one regarding knowledge of the Italian press and the other regarding the knowledge of the Italian television programs. The response scale was a 5 point Likert-type ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very well*).

5. Homeland mass-media consumption was assessed by means of a single item about the knowledge of homeland television programs available abroad on satellite. The response scale was a 5 point Likert-type ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very well*).
6. A brief list of socio-demographic items.

The data analysis was performed in two stages: (a) descriptive analysis; (b) hypothesis verification.

First we conducted some preliminary analyses in order to describe participants testing differences between ethnic groups by means of ANOVA. Then we verified our hypothesis via structural equations modeling testing also the structural invariance of the model across gender and ethno-cultural groups.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive analyses

Table 1 reported means and ANOVA statistics for each variable considered. As far as length of stay is concerned, significant differences have been found among the three groups. Arabians have the higher values whereas Romanians the lower ones. This difference can be traced back to the real trends of migration fluxes. As a matter

of fact, the most ancient immigrant community in Italy is that coming from North Africa, mostly from the Maghreb area, while Romanian immigration toward Italy started at the turn of the century and increased after the year 2003 (Caritas/Migrantes Dossier, 2006).

No differences emerged among groups in the proficiency in Italian that can be considered quite good. However, the three groups behaved differently when it comes to use Italian idiom talking with ingroup members. Results showed that in general participants preferred to use their mother tongue when talking with family members and compatriots, probably by reason to the unique familiarity with the idiom. However, if mother tongue is largely preferred by all the three groups for family talks, intergroup differences emerged when considering the talks with compatriots. As table 1 shows, in that case Latinos and Romanians tended to be more bilingual than Arabians. This result could be understood by hypothesizing that, with compatriots, identity issues could be slighter than with family members, and by considering the greater similarity between Spanish and Italian, and between Romanian and Italian (all of them have Romance roots), that can favour the shift between the languages, mostly in the case of Spanish speakers.

The same practical reason could be adduced to explain the better knowledge of Italian media by the Latino group, both TV and



newspaper, while a specular motivation could explain the lower level of knowledge of the Arabian group on this topic. Latinos and Arabians, however, showed the greater familiarity with their homeland media too.

Finally, about emotional belonging, Arabian and Romanian groups felt themselves nearer to the Italian group than did Latinos.

### *Predictors of Emotional belonging*

To test our hypotheses we developed a structural equation model assuming the influences postulated above. The constructs for which we had several indicators were inserted into the model as latent variables (i.e. *Emotional belonging*, *Italian Mass Media Consumption*, and *Use of Italian with In-group members*), whereas *Length of Stay*, *Proficiency in Italian*, and *Homeland Mass Media Consumption* were introduced in the model as single indicators. As is usually recommended (Bollen & Long, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1998), we tested the model fit by using different fit indexes in order to reduce the impact of their limits. We used the  $\chi^2$ , CFI (Bentler, 1990), TLI (Tucker & Lewis, 1973) — also known as NNFI (Bentler & Bonett, 1980) — and RMSEA (Steiger, 1980). For CFI and TLI, values higher than 0.90 were considered satisfactory (cf. Bentler 1990). As for

RMSEA, we followed Browne (1990), who considers values lower than 0.08 to be satisfactory and values lower than 0.05 to be good.

The model that we tested proved acceptable according to all the fit indexes except  $\chi^2$ :  $\chi^2(49) = 129.00$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $CFI = .94$ ,  $TLI = .92$ ,  $RMSEA = .053$  (90% CL = .042, .065). Given that the significance of  $\chi^2$  depends on the sample size and that our sample was quite large ( $N = 576$ ), we considered this model to be satisfactory. All estimated parameters were significant. Figure 1 shows the validated model.

As hypothesized, we found the following influences to apply:

(a) proficiency in Italian positively influences Italian mass-media consumption ( $\beta = .41$ ), the use of Italian with in-group members ( $\beta = .26$ ), and the sense of emotional belonging to Italian culture ( $\beta = .11$ ); (b) the use of Italian with in-group members positively influences emotional belonging ( $\beta = .24$ ); (c) Italian mass media consumption positively influences emotional belonging ( $\beta = .15$ ), while homeland mass-media consumption has a negative influence ( $\beta = -.18$ ); (d) length of stay positively influences proficiency in Italian ( $\beta = .32$ ) and impacts negatively on the consumption of ethnic mass media ( $\beta = -.16$ ). The whole set of predictors explains 16% of the emotional belonging variance.

*Structural invariance of the model*

The last step in our analysis was to test the invariance of the model across gender and ethno-cultural groups. To test the hypothesis of structural invariance, we followed the procedure indicated by Reise, Widaman, and Pugh (1993). We first tested our model simultaneously on both gender groups (Baseline model or B), then we performed a second test ( $M_1$ ), assuming invariance of regression weights in men and women; this means that these parameters were fixed so as to be equal in both groups. We followed a similar procedure dividing the sample into three ethno-cultural groups. The hypothesis of invariance may be accepted if the difference in the  $\chi^2$  values of the  $M_1$  model, compared to the B model, is not significant for a number of degrees of freedom equal to the difference in degrees of freedom of the two models. In other words, a model is invariant if the constraining parameters to invariance do not significantly increase the  $\chi^2$ , thereby worsening the model fit. Results showed that the relations between variables in our model do not vary across genders: B model  $\chi^2(80) = 166.00, p < .01, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .043$  (90% CL = .034, .053);  $M_1 \chi^2(89) = 181.08, p < .01, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .042$  (90% CL = .034, .051);  $M_1 - B \chi^2(9)_d = 15.08, p = .09$ . However the model vary across ethnic groups: B  $\chi^2(120) = 234.92, p < .01, CFI = .91, TLI = .89, RMSEA = .041$  (90% CL = .033, .049);  $M_1 \chi^2(138) = 282.73, p < .01, CFI = .89, TLI = .87,$

$RMSEA = .043$  (90% CL = .036, .050);  $M_1 - B \chi^2(18)_d = 47.81, p < .01$ . So we tested a partial invariance hypothesis, which occurs when the majority of the parameters of a model (but not all) do not vary across groups (Reise, Widaman, & Pugh, 1993). The exploration of the regression weights matrix and the modification indexes led us to test a second model ( $M_2$ ), where all the regression weights between variables, except two, were invariant across groups. The free parameters were on the one hand the influence of length of stay on proficiency in Italian language, and on the other hand the influence of proficiency in Italian on Italian mass-media consumption. These were forced to be invariant between Latinos and Romanian, but were freely estimated in the North African group. This second model did not determine a significant  $\chi^2$  increase:  $M_2 \chi^2(136) = 257.03, p < .01, CFI = .91, TLI = .89, RMSEA = .039$  (90% CL = .032, .047);  $M_2 - B \chi^2(16)_d = 22.11, p = .14$ .

We can assert that the relations of our model are fully invariant between Latinos and Romanians, whereas in the North African group two parameters differ from the other groups. Both parameters are smaller in the North African group than in the other two.

## DISCUSSION

In this study we investigated the influence of length of stay, proficiency in the host language, and media exposure on the sense of emotional belonging of immigrants from three ethno-cultural groups residing in Italy. Data substantially supported our hypothesis: on the whole, our model explained a relevant part of the sense of emotional belonging (16% of its variance), thereby underlining the importance of language in this process.

As predicted, greater competency in the host language increased adaptation, and influenced emotional attachment both directly and indirectly. Thus, host language proficiency seems to be a necessary key to access the host country's values and customs. Indeed, linguistic proficiency eases daily interaction with host-culture members, which undoubtedly helps immigrants increase their comprehension of the norms governing social events and relations.

Results showed that the influence of the linguistic aspect on the sense of belonging to Italian culture is multiple, and it implies an increased use of Italian with in-group members as well as increased host mass-media consumption, which in turn had considerable impact on emotional attachment. This result is consistent with previous scientific literature on this topic (Kim, 1988; Reece & Palmgreen, 2000; Sam & Berry, 1995). Indeed, among the variables that we considered as predictors of this kind of belonging, only homeland

mass-media consumption was not affected by host language proficiency; in fact, homeland mass-media consumption exerted a negative influence on immigrants' attachment to the host group.

The complex pattern of relations that emerged from our data seems to denote that host language proficiency can be considered a key variable in the psychological negotiation between cultural entities that leads to immigrants' adaptation (Berry, 2001). It implies a necessary passage through the practice of host language inside the in-group, which probably fosters the fusion (or the substitution) of symbolic elements and values of the immigrants' own culture with those of the host culture (LaFromboise et al., 1993). Another necessary passage is that of mass-media consumption, which proved to be a vector of cultural elements (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). These last aspects seem of particular interest and showed that the acculturation process is really bi-dimensional, involving a negotiation with the two cultural identities to which immigrants refer (Tropp et al., 1999). In other words, we may assume that the consumption of host mass-media increases the acquisition of values, customs and practices that facilitate immigrants' entry into the host culture (Kim, 1988), while homeland mass-media consumption favours a persisting of original culture features, thereby strengthening the links with the immigrants' original ethnic background.

Taken together, our results lead us to consider language as a fundamental factor in the acculturation process; moreover, they also seem to clarify the role of length of stay. The mere fact of staying abroad did not seem to exert a direct influence on immigrants psychological adaptation. Length of stay, however, helped increase host language proficiency and reduced homeland mass-media consumption. This last effect was probably due to the progressive discrepancy between on the one hand the contents offered by homeland media, and on the other hand the everyday life experiences of immigrants in their host culture.

The strength of our model was also supported by its invariance across genders. Furthermore, the partial invariance across ethno-cultural groups was also promising: the model resulted fully invariant across two groups (Latinos and Romanians), while there were slight variation in the third group (Arabic speakers). It is important to note that there is a much greater difference between Italian and Arabic, and Italian and the other languages considered (Spanish and Romanian). Indeed, these last two share Latin origins and a common alphabet, while Arabic has very different etymological sources. This distance between languages might help explain the lighter influence exerted by length of stay on Italian proficiency in the North-African group. Probably due to the difficulty of learning Italian for these participants,

the simple passing of time did not necessarily improved their knowledge of the host language. The North-African group differed also in the effect of Italian proficiency on Italian mass-media consumption: this was lower compared to the other two groups. Again, this result (mainly referred to newspaper consumption) is to be linked to the relative similarity among Romance languages and alphabets: though it is reasonable to hypothesize that oral comprehension of Italian is probably accompanied by a certain reading ability in the case of other Romance-language speakers, this would be not the case for Arabic speakers. Regarding these participants, it appears that proficiency in oral Italian does not necessarily increase Italian media consumption, since this factor was partly assessed in reference to knowledge of the Italian press.

## CONCLUSION

In short, our model showed the relations among length of stay, language, mass-media consumption and adaptation. These relations are well known in literature, however the use of SEM technique allowed us to verify a causal model including some mediation effects.

The centrality of language in immigrants' psychological adaptation does not mean that language is *the only* key, as this might lead us to underestimate the influence of other factors on



psychological adjustment, namely frequency and quality of social interactions with host-culture members. A necessary development of the present study would be to increase the number of predictors for the emotional sense of belonging in order to explain more of its variance.

A valuable aspect of this study is that it was conducted on three of the most representative ethno-cultural groups of immigrants in Italy (on the whole more than a third of the immigrant population in the country), and this allows for adequate generalizability of our results. However, further investigation on different ethno-cultural and linguistic groups is required in order to refine our interpretations.

Moreover, it should be pointed out that the subjects in our study were all first-generation immigrants, due to the relative novelty of this phenomenon in Italy. It would undoubtedly be of interest to run a similar research on second generation immigrants as well, in order to increase our understanding of how host language proficiency and original language retention influence the adaptation of immigrants born in Italy (Phinney & Flores, 2002).

Furthermore, the role of exposure to mass-media in cultural transmission should be investigated further, both in terms of quantity and quality. As our data suggests, the media can play a contradictory role on immigrants' acculturation. On the one hand, they are social and cultural agent that may facilitate the process; on the other hand,

they may also impede it by personalizing international relations (Keshishian, 2000). An interesting research line might be to investigate how the different images of immigrant groups proposed by host culture media (both in host and in homeland countries) might influence immigrant adaptation.

On the whole this study suggests some applicative cues. The first concerns the opportunity to promote the teaching of the host language to immigrants, in order to increase their level of adaptation. The second cue concerns the relevance of mass-media consumption in the acculturation process, which suggests possible specific uses in order to spread acceptance of the host culture among immigrants.

## References

- Barnett, G. A., & McPhail, T. (1980). An examination of the relationship of United States television and Canadian identity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 4, 219-232.
- Bentler, P. M. (1990). Comparative fit indexes in structural models. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107, 238-246.
- Bentler, P. M., & Bonett, D. G. (1980). Significance tests and goodness of fit in the analysis of covariance structures. *Psychological Bulletin*, 88, 588-606.

- Berry J. W. (1970). Marginality, stress, and ethnic identification in: an acculturated Aboriginal community. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 1*, 17–22.
- Berry, J. W. (1980). Acculturation as a variety of adaptation. In Padilla A. (Ed.), *Acculturation, Theory, Models and Some New Findings*. Westview, Colorado: Press inc.
- Berry, J. W. (1990). Psychology of acculturation. In Berman, J (Ed.) *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, vol. 37 (pp. 201-234). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 46*, 5-34
- Berry, J. W. (2001). A psychology of immigration. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*, 615–631.
- Berry, J. W., Poortiga, Y. P., Segall, M. H., & Dasen, P. R. (1992). *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Berry, J. W., Phinney, J. S., Sam, D. L., & Vedder, P. (2006). Immigrant youth: acculturation,, identity, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 55*, 303-332.
- Bollen, K. A., & Long, J. S. (1993). *Testing Structural Equation Models*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Browne, M. W. (1990). *Mutsum Pc: User's Guide*. Columbus: Ohio State University, Departement of Psychology.
- Buriel, R. (1993). Acculturation, respect for cultural differences, and biculturalism among three generations of Mexican American and Euro-American school children. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 154, 531-543.
- Caritas/Migrantes (2006). *Immigrazione. Dossier Statistico XVI Rapporto*. Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS: Roma.
- Cuellar, I., Harris, L. C., & Jasso, R. (1980). An acculturation scale for Mexican American normal and clinical populations. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Science*, 2, 199-217.
- Gerbner, G. (1969). Towards cultural indicators. *AV Communication Review*, 17, 137-148.
- Harré, R. (1998). *The Singular Self*. London: Sage.
- Hu, L., & Bentler, P. M. (1998). Fit indices in covariance structure modeling: Sensitivity to underparameterized model misspecification. *Psychological Methods*, 3, 424-453.
- Keshishian, F. (2000). Acculturation, communication, and the U. S. mass media: the experience of an Iranian immigrant. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 11, 93-106.

- Kim, Y. Y. (1984). Searching for creative integration. In *Methods for Intercultural Communication Research, Vol. 8. International and Intercultural Communication Annual*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Kim, Y. Y. (1988). *Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation: An Integrative Theory*. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters Limited.
- LaFromboise, T., Coleman, H., & Gerton, J. (1993). Psychological impact of biculturalism: Evidence and theory. *Psychological Bulletin, 114*, 395-412.
- Landry, R., & Bourhis, J. W. (1997). Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 16*, 23-49.
- Liebkind, K. (2001). Acculturation. In Brown, R, Gaertner, S. (Eds), *Blackwell Handbook Of Social Psychology: Intergroup Processes* (pp. 386-406). Blackwell.
- Nguyen, H., Messé, L., & Stollak, G. (1999). Toward a more complex understanding of acculturation and adjustment: Cultural involvements and psychosocial functioning in Vietnamese youth. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 30*, 5-31.

- Phinney, J. S., & Flores, J. (2002). "Unpackaging" acculturation: Aspects of acculturation as predictors of traditional sex roles attitudes. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 33, 320-331.
- Redfield, R., Linton, R., & Herskovits, M. (1936). Memorandum on the study of acculturation. *American Anthropologist*, 38, 149-152.
- Reece, D., & Palmgreen, P. (2000). Coming to America: Need for acculturation and media use motives among Indian sojourners in the US. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 24, 807-824.
- Reise, S. P., Widaman, K. F., & Pugh, R. H. (1993). Confirmatory factor analysis and item response theory: Two approaches for exploring measurement invariance. *Psychological Bulletin*, 114, 552-566.
- Sam, D. L., & Berry, J. W. (1995). Acculturative stress among young immigrants in Norway. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 36, 10-24.
- Sam, D. L., Vedder, P., Ward, C., & Horenczyk, G. (2006). Psychological and sociocultural adaptation of immigrant youth. In Berry, J. W., Phinney, J. S., Sam, D. L., Vedder, P. (Eds), *Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition: Acculturation, Identity,*

*and Adaptation Across National Contexts* (pp. 117-141).

Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Searle, W., & Ward, C. (1990). The prediction of psychological and sociocultural adjustment during cross-cultural transitions.

*International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 14, 449-464.

Shibutani, T., & Kwan, L. (1965). *Ethnic Stratification. A*

*Comparative Approach*. New York: Macmillan.

Steiger, J. H. (1980). Structural model evaluation and modification.

An interval estimation approach. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 25, 173-180.

Stevens, G. W. J. M., Pels, T. V. M., Vollebergh, W. A. M., &

Crijnen, A. A. M. (2004). Patterns of psychological acculturation in adult and adolescent Moroccan immigrants living in the Netherlands. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 35, 689-704.

Tropp, L. R., Erkut, S., Garcia Coll, C., Alarcón, O., & Vázquez

Garcia, H. A. (1999). Psychological acculturation: development of a new measure for Puerto Ricans on the U. S. mainland. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 59, 351-367.

Tucker, L. R., & Lewis, C. (1973). A reliability coefficient for maximum likelihood factor analysis. *Psychometrika*, 38, 1-10.

Varan, D. (1998). The cultural erosion metaphor and the transcultural impact of media. *Journal of Communication*, 48, 58-85.

- Vedder, P., & Virta, E. (2005). Language, ethnic identity, and the adaptation of Turkish immigrant youth in the Netherlands and Sweden. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 317-337.
- Ward, C. (1996). Acculturation. In Landis, D., Bhagat, R. (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training* (pp. 124-147). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.).
- Ward, C. (2001). The A, B, Cs of acculturation. In Matsumoto, D. (Ed.), *Handbook Of Culture And Psychology* (pp. 411-445). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ward, C., Kennedy, A. (1999). The measurement of sociocultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23, 659-677.
- Ward, C., Okura, Y., Kennedy, A., & Kojima, T. (1998). The U-curve on trial: a longitudinal study of psychological and sociocultural adjustment during cross-cultural transition. *Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 22, 277-291.



## Tables and Figures

Table 1.

*Differences among groups*

	<i>Latinos</i>	<i>Romanians</i>	<i>Arabians</i>	<i>Tot</i>	<i>F(573)</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Post-hoc*</i>
	(a)	(b)	(c)				
Length of stay	5.54	4.32	6.88	5.54	15.75	<.01	a>b; c>a; c>b
Language proficiency	3.37	3.41	3.51	3.42	1.19	n.s.	
Use of Italian with family members	1.50	1.70	1.51	1.57	2.91	n.s.	
Use of Italian with compatriots	1.95	1.92	1.47	1.79	13.16	<.01	a>c; b>c
Knowledge of Italian press	3.32	2.92	2.86	3.04	9.14	<.01	a>b; a>c
Knowledge of Italian TV	3.55	3.11	2.95	3.21	15.18	<.01	a>b; a>c
Knowledge of homeland TV	3.65	3.03	3.56	3.41	14.11	<.01	a>b; c>b
<b>Emotional belonging (PAS)</b>	12.00	13.82	13.84	13.19	20.36	<.01	b>a; c>a

\* *Thamane post-hoc test; p < .05*

## Figure caption

Figure 1. Model of influence of length of stay, linguistic competence and media exposure on immigrants acculturation: Standardized regression weights.

Figure 1.

